

## Guests, employees celebrate T Plant's 60th anniversary

More than 150 employees and guests celebrated the 60-year anniversary of the groundbreaking for T Plant on June 26 with speeches, music and lunch on the lawn in front of the plant. Michele Gerber, Fluor Hanford senior communications specialist and Hanford historian, delivered the keynote address. Guests included the Department of Energy Richland Operations Office, director of Waste Management, George Sanders; DOE facility representatives Dale Splett and Tom Davies; Fluor Hanford Executive Vice President Tom Harper; and John Perkins of the Fluor Hanford Waste Management Project.

David Levinskas, project support manager at T Plant, introduced Gerber and reminded the audience that T Plant, which formed the backdrop for the celebration, was in existence before most of the audience was born. "The plant is the oldest and longest operating nuclear facility in the world, and it continues to serve Hanford Site today as it stands ready to receive the shipments of sludge from the K Basins."

Gerber recalled that at the time of the groundbreaking, June 26, 1943, the popular dance was the jitterbug, Betty Grable was a popular pinup girl, and on a more sobering note, many of the major battles of World War II had not yet been fought.

At that time at Hanford, more than 51,000 workers were housed on site, just east of T Plant. Running water was scarce and there was limited electrical service to the area. Yet 10 months after the groundbreaking, the roof of T Plant was in place. Five months later, the operations workers took over the facility from the construction workers, and the chemical-processing work began. On Dec. 26, 1944, the first chemical-processing production run using irradiated uranium from B Reactor occurred. In February 1945, the first plutonium product was sent from Hanford to Los Alamos.

In just over two years after construction began on this facility, the plutonium product from T Plant was used in the world's first atomic explosion in July 1945 and in the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki, Japan, in August 1945.



Photo courtesy of Dan Connors, Fluor Hanford

**On June 26 Hanford marked the 60th anniversary of the groundbreaking for T Plant. Throughout its life, the facility has served the country with its chemical processing, decontamination and waste-handling missions.**

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Gerber related the story of a late Prosser resident who had been a Japanese prisoner of war working in the Kokura Arsenal as a slave laborer. The man heard the drone of a bomber's engines as it flew above, concealed by a thick cloud cover on Aug. 9, 1945. The next day, the POWs were free to leave the arsenal as the guards had fled. The man made his way to meet American troops and learned that the bomber he heard fly over Kokura had not been able to hit its target, the arsenal, but went on instead to its secondary target, the city of Nagasaki.

T Plant continued its chemical- processing mission until 1956, when its mission became decontamination. Waste-handling operations were added to the decontamination mission in 1990.

"T Plant is a significant part of American history. It behooves us to know it better than anyone else, be prepared to speak about it and view it with balance. I believe that we should be very honored to be associated with such a great gray lady," concluded Gerber.



Photo courtesy of Dan Conners, Fluor Hanford

**One of the caterers prepares lunch for attendees of T Plant's 60th anniversary celebration.**

The full text of Gerber's address is being posted on the Hanford Intranet site and can be found by going to the T Plant Web site at <http://apweb02.rl.gov/phmc/TPLANT/>, clicking on "Priorities, Plans and Schedules" and then "What's New."

To learn more about T Plant's history, visit the *Hanford Reach* Web page at <http://www.hanford.gov/reach/> to access the Sept. 16, 2002, story by Michele Gerber, "T Plant begins drying and removing Shippingport Reactor spent nuclear fuel," which is also the source document for the June 23 story, "T Plant at 60 years — where Hanford's past, present and future meet." ■